

United States Department of State

Misconceptions About U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua

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Children in exile camps
in the Middle East. Most are
refugees from the revolution in
Iran.

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Misconceptions About U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua

Introduction

In July 1979, the Nicaraguan people overthrew the Somoza dictatorship. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which led the military struggle, pledged that it would promote political pluralism, respect for human rights, a mixed economy, and a nonaligned foreign policy. Since 1979, the Sandinistas have steered the revolution toward Marxism-Leninism, leaving their original promises unfulfilled. The U.S. Government sought from the outset to build a positive relationship with the new Government of National Reconstruction (GRN), but as the Sandinistas made clear that they had no intention of fulfilling their earlier promises, relations between the two nations deteriorated.

The complexities of the situation in Nicaragua, accompanied by a vigorous Sandinista propaganda campaign, have resulted in much confusion about U.S. policy toward Nicaragua. This pamphlet corrects the most common misconceptions.

Misconception: U.S. policy is aimed at overthrowing the Sandinista regime.

Facts:

- U.S. policy toward Nicaragua has four objectives:

- 1) An end to Nicaraguan support for guerrilla groups in neighboring countries;
- 2) Severance of Nicaraguan military and security ties to Cuba and the Soviet Bloc;
- 3) Reduction of Nicaragua's military strength to levels that would restore military equilibrium to the region; and
- 4) Fulfillment of the original Sandinista promises to support democratic pluralism and respect human and civil rights.

- The Sandinistas are aware of these objectives and know that the concerns of the United States and Nicaragua's democratic neighbors could be met by implementation of the Sandinista's promises to the Organization of American States.



July 26, 1979, Holguin, Cuba: Within a week of their defeating the Somoza regime, top Sandinista leaders flew to Cuba to celebrate their victory with Fidel Castro and to commemorate the traditional Cuban revolution holiday, the 26th of July. This photo shows Fidel Castro and Comandante Bayardo Arce, Political Committee Coordinator of the FSLN.

(Bohemia, 1979)

- The objectives of the United States are consistent with what the Central Americans themselves seek and with the 21 points adopted in September 1983 by the participants, including Nicaragua, in the Contadora process. Each has emphasized that peace and development for the region in the future depend on bringing democracy to Nicaragua.

- U.S. policy is based on active pursuit of a diplomatic alternative and pressure, including pressure from the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance, to force the Sandinistas to change their totalitarian structure and end support for subversion against the Central American democracies.

Misconception: The Sandinistas are essentially reform-minded nationalists, but U.S. hostility has driven them into the arms of Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Facts:

- The FSLN leadership is composed of committed revolutionaries who openly embrace Marxist-Leninist ideology. They claim to be a vanguard party with a historic right to lead the Nicaraguan people to "socialism" (read: communism). The Sandinistas condemn the United States as the center of capitalism and imperialism and thus the principal obstacle to world revolution. The FSLN hymn proclaims the Sandinistas "will fight against the Yankee, enemy of humanity."

- In a secret speech made in the spring of 1984 to the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), a Moscow-line Communist party, Sandinista National Directorate member and political coordinator Bayardo Arce acknowledged that the FSLN had never intended to comply with its promises to promote pluralism, a mixed economy, and nonalignment. Arce explained that the FSLN had made these commitments simply to gain international support and thereby forestall possible

U.S. intervention. He referred to elections as "a nuisance" and described the FSLN's goal of building a Socialist Nicaragua with "a dictatorship of the proletariat." Arce closed his speech appealing for "the unity of the Marxist-Leninists of Nicaragua." (The complete text of the Arce speech was printed in the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia* on July 31, 1984.)

- The Sandinistas' fraternal relations with the Communist government of Cuba are based both on ideology and the long history of Cuban support for the FSLN. The Sandinistas regard Fidel Castro as their mentor. Not only did he furnish them with a model for their revolution, Castro also provided shelter and training during their 18 years of struggle against Somoza, and he supplied them with the weapons for their final offensive in 1979. Castro has continually coached the Sandinistas, and he even brokered the arrangement among the three FSLN factions, which led to the formation of the current National Directorate in March 1979.

- Within a week of the Sandinista victory in 1979, Cuba placed about 100 military and security personnel in Nicaragua. Currently, the number of such advisers has swollen to 2,500–3,500. In addition, Cuba has stationed thousands of "civilians" in Nicaragua, including a vast array of technicians and advisers as well as teachers, doctors, and construction workers.

- In addition to the Cubans, Nicaragua also has at least 200 Soviet and other East-Bloc military advisers, and about 50 advisers from Libya and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

- The United States openly distanced itself from the Somoza regime in 1978–79, and in June 1979 co-sponsored an Organization of American States resolution calling for its replacement.

- The United States endeavored to foster good relations with the new Sandinista govern-



Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega with Soviet leaders during one of his many trips to Moscow.

(Sovfoto-Eastfoto, 1982)

ment and offered it an alternative to alignment with Cuba and the Soviet Union. After July 1979, \$129 million in economic and food aid, including \$5.1 million to Nicaraguan non-governmental organizations, was obligated by the United States for Nicaragua. The United States also supported the flow of \$1.6 billion from international financial institutions and Western democracies and the refinancing of Nicaragua's debt to private foreign banks.

- Because evidence showed that the Sandinistas were materially supporting the Communist guerrillas in El Salvador, the United States first suspended aid to Nicaragua in late 1980. In January 1981, aid was reinitiated, but in April 1981 the United States discontinued economic assistance because of Nicaragua's continued support for the Salvadoran guerrillas.

Misconception: U.S. hostility has compelled the Sandinistas to develop a large military force for their own protection.

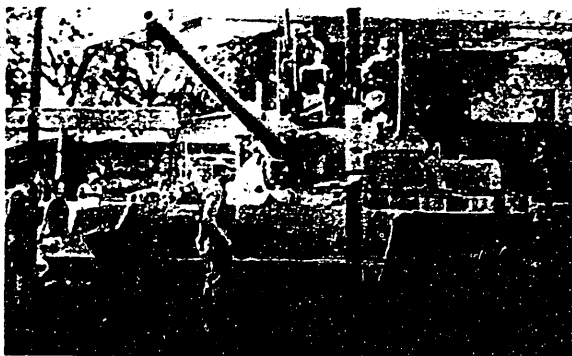
Facts:

- The Sandinistas have always intended to establish a one-party Marxist state with an oversized military. In September 1979, just 2 months

after seizing power, the Sandinista leadership met in seclusion for 3 days to map out its plans to consolidate the revolution internally and to promote "revolutionary internationalism." The report of this meeting, "Analysis of the Situation and Tasks of the Sandinista Peoples' Revolution" (commonly referred to as the "72-Hour Document"), has been the blueprint that the Sandinistas have followed for more than 7 years.

- The Sandinistas planned from the outset to create a large military establishment, closely emulating the Cuban model. Long before any serious armed opposition arose, the Sandinista Peoples' Army (controlled at all levels by the FSLN party) made plans for increasing its manpower, building numerous bases, and training personnel in the use of sophisticated military hardware. The current growth in the Sandinista Army merely continues the practice decided on in 1979-1980.

- The size of the Sandinista military now exceeds all legitimate defensive needs and is far larger than that of any other Central American country. Sandinista active duty forces are estimated to exceed 75,000, some 6 times the size of Somoza's National Guard at its peak. These troops are supplemented by approximately



The Sandinistas now have at least 350 tanks and armored vehicles. The mainstay of this armored force is some 110 Soviet-made T-55 tanks, including this one in Managua. Nicaragua also has nearly 30 PT-76 light amphibious tanks.

60,000 members of reserve and militia units. Moreover, the Sandinistas have acquired huge amounts of Soviet hardware, including at least 350 tanks and armored vehicles, scores of artillery pieces and multiple rocket launchers, patrol boats and dozens of helicopters, including 12 Mi-25s, the Soviets' top-of-the-line attack gunship. In 1986 alone, the Department of Defense estimated that some \$600 million in military assistance was provided to Nicaragua by the Soviet Bloc.

Misconception: U.S. actions forced the Sandinistas to implement the State of Emergency that now suspends many of the civil liberties of Nicaraguans.

Facts:

- Long before the Sandinistas faced any threat from armed opposition forces, they were already committing repressive acts.
- In November 1980, Sandinista security forces gunned down Jorge Salazar, the vice president of the private sector umbrella group, Supreme Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP).
- In November 1980 and again in March 1981, the Sandinistas blocked the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement Party headed by former junta member Alfonso Robelo from holding peaceful rallies.
- In early 1981, the Sandinistas arrested the President of the Permanent Commission on Human Rights (CPDH), Jose Esteban Gonzalez, and occupied the Commission's office. (The ensuing international uproar over his arrest convinced the Sandinistas to release Gonzalez; he now lives in exile, having been convicted in absentia of subversive acts and condemned to a lengthy prison sentence.)
- In February 1981, the Sandinistas arrested numerous Miskito Indian leaders for protesting Sandinista mistreatment of the indigenous

population of the Atlantic Coast region. In late 1981—early 1982, the Sandinistas forced approximately 14,000 Miskitos to move from their ancestral homelands to distant resettlement camps. (These and other repressive acts have caused more than 30,000 Miskitos to flee into exile.)

- Beginning in 1981, the independent daily *La Prensa* was heavily censored, shut down frequently, and its owners and workers threatened. The newspaper was closed indefinitely by the government in July 1986.

- In October 1981, five private sector leaders were jailed for 5 months for signing a letter protesting the Sandinistas' actions to implant Marxism-Leninism in Nicaragua.

- Despite Sandinista claims that the Democratic Resistance had been "strategically defeated," on January 9, 1987, just 3 hours after the new Nicaraguan constitution had been announced, the Sandinistas suspended rights that the document purported to grant—including:



July 9, 1984, Managua, Nicaragua: In the continuing conflict between the Catholic Church and the Sandinistas, Nicaragua's Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo and many priests demonstrated against Sandinista treatment of Father Luis Amado Pena. Sandinista authorities had accused Pena of "counterrevolutionary activities" and placed him under house arrest. The Sandinistas responded by expelling 10 priests, including some who had not even participated in the demonstration.

(Wide World photo)

Right of individual liberties, personal security, and habeas corpus;
Right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty and right to appeal;
Right to trial;
Freedom of movement;
Freedom from arbitrary interference in personal life, family, home, and correspondence;
Freedom of information;
Freedom of expression;
Right of peaceful assembly;
Freedom of association;
Right to organize unions; and
Right to strike.

Misconception: The United States is seeking a military solution, and charges about the Sandinistas' military buildup and their possible acquisition of MiGs are intended to lay the groundwork for an eventual invasion.

Facts:

- President Reagan has made clear that the United States has no plans or desire to introduce U.S. combat troops into Central America. The United States actively supports a negotiated political solution, including the Contadora process, to the situation in Central America.
- The Sandinistas' military buildup is a major destabilizing element in the region and a matter of grave concern to Nicaragua's neighbors. Costa Rica has no army. Honduras relies on its small air force to offset partially the Sandinistas' overwhelming superiority in ground forces. The introduction of MiGs or other high-performance aircraft would neutralize Honduras' only deterrent and further destabilize the region.
- At the same time, the United States cannot ignore the fact that the Sandinistas, supported

by the Cubans and the Soviets, are carrying out a military-based strategy both internally and externally in the region. It is they who seek a military solution, both for their own internal situation and for the guerrilla war in El Salvador.

Misconception: The United States is responsible for Nicaragua's economic crisis.

Facts:

- Sandinista policies, which emphasize Marxist ideology over economic realities, are the root cause of Nicaragua's economic deterioration. While the Sandinistas have paid lip service to a mixed economy, their 1987 constitution mandates state direction of the national economy (Article 99). Even that part of the economy still in private hands is subject to strict government regulation.

- Sandinista anti-private sector policies such as confiscations—often used to punish political opponents—high taxes, declining internal financial credit, and stringent controls on prices, wages, and foreign exchange have strangled private enterprise, discouraged production, and prompted many Nicaraguan business leaders, managers, and professionals to go into exile.

- These misguided policies have exacerbated the problems caused by damage during the revolution and the world economic recession. Today, the per capita Gross Domestic Product is more than 40% below the 1977 pre-revolutionary level, and exports have declined 66% in nominal terms. The foreign debt has more than tripled from \$1.6 billion in 1980 to approximately \$5.5 billion in 1986, and Nicaragua is seriously in arrears in debt repayments to most of its major creditors. The Nicaraguan people are suffering from growing shortages of food and basic consumer goods, an inflation rate of 650% according to the Government of Nicaragua, a two-thirds drop in purchasing power since the revolution, and more than 20% unemployment.

- The United States initially supported assistance to Nicaragua by international financial institutions, and for 18 months provided more bilateral economic aid than any other country to Nicaragua. Much of the deterioration in the Nicaraguan economy occurred prior to May 1985 when the United States finally imposed trade sanctions on Nicaragua in response to the Sandinistas' unceasing efforts to subvert their neighbors, destabilizing military buildup, close ties to the Soviet Bloc, and continued nondemocratic rule.

Misconception: The Sandinistas have attempted to improve relations with the United States while the United States has done nothing in return.

Facts:

- The United States has made numerous attempts to engage the Sandinistas in serious negotiations. Senior U.S. diplomats have traveled to Nicaragua repeatedly to discuss our concerns directly with the Sandinistas. During his June 1, 1984, visit to Managua, Secretary of State George Shultz designated a Special Envoy for Central America to represent the United States in bilateral meetings with the Sandinistas.

- At the request of the Contadora Group, in June 1984 the U.S. initiated a series of bilateral discussions with Nicaragua. Nine rounds of talks were held. The United States entered the discussions prepared to reach bilateral understandings that would facilitate conclusion of a comprehensive Contadora agreement. The Sandinistas' purpose was to negotiate bilateral accords dealing exclusively with their own security concerns. The Sandinistas refused to discuss their commitments to the Contadora process relating to internal reconciliation and democratization.

- Between March 1986 and February 1987, Special Envoy Philip Habib made 11 trips to Cen-

tral America to support efforts for a negotiated solution to the crisis in that region.

- When the Sandinistas have made positive gestures, the United States has responded favorably. For example, in December 1983 Secretary Shultz publicly welcomed the Sandinista announcement of upcoming elections and offer of amnesty for the rebels, expressing hope that these would become a reality. Unfortunately, the Sandinistas' actions, such as continuing to support the Salvadoran insurgents, repression of opposition politicians, harassment of church leaders, and censorship, run counter to their professed willingness to be flexible.

Misconception: The United States is supporting former Somocistas who are spreading terror in Nicaragua.

Facts:

- The vast majority of those now in armed opposition to the Sandinistas had no ties with the Somoza regime, and many were actually Sandinista fighters. Resistance political leaders were enemies of Somoza and played active roles in the revolution. They and thousands of other Nicaraguans, mostly poor peasants and workers, became disillusioned by the Sandinistas' broken promises and mistreatment of the population. Judging that civic opposition within the Sandinista-run system was futile, they have taken up arms to restore the revolution's original goals. They have chosen to risk their lives rather than submit to the Sandinista regime.

- Of the resistance's military leadership, only 27% are former members of the Nicaraguan National Guard. The majority of resistance military leaders are former Sandinistas (20%) or civilians with no prior military experience (53%).

- Of the approximately 17,000 resistance fighters, fewer than 200 were once members of



September 1986—President Daniel Ortega, Libyan ruler Muammar Qadhafi, and Fidel Castro clasp hands to demonstrate solidarity at the Non-Aligned Summit in Harare, Zimbabwe.

(AFP Photo)

the National Guard. The overwhelming majority of resistance fighters are Nicaraguan peasants, the intended beneficiaries of the revolution who the Sandinistas have betrayed.

• The armed opposition has focused its operations on military objectives and some government-owned companies and facilities. Tragically, innocent civilians have been victimized by both the Sandinistas and the armed resistance in Nicaragua's civil war. In an attempt to minimize noncombatant casualties, the resistance has developed a code of conduct, and its fighters receive instruction on the necessity of respecting human rights. There is no systematic resistance policy of targeting civilians. The Sandinistas, however, have adopted a practice of mixing civilian government workers with military troops in truck convoys and militarized agricultural cooperatives, and civilians have been killed when these have been attacked. The Sandinistas are engaged in a propaganda campaign to use such incidents to portray the resistance as human rights violators. It is more likely that the Sandinistas through use of heavy weapons—multiple rocket launchers, artillery, and helicopter gunships—have inflicted far more civilian casualties than have their opponents.

Misconception: Nicaragua's neighbors have never protested that the Sandinistas were assisting insurgents, and the United States has never produced any evidence of Sandinista support for subversion.

Facts:

- The Governments of El Salvador and Honduras have repeatedly denounced the Sandinistas' materiel support for armed Marxist groups. Guerrilla documents, captured weapons shipments, and statements by guerrilla prisoners and defectors prove continuing Nicaraguan support for Salvadoran insurgents.

- President Jose Napoleon Duarte of El Salvador has said, "Nicaragua has been the springboard, the sanctuary for the whole Salvadoran guerrilla movement." (El Salvador Education Television, May 28, 1986)

- The Honduran military has captured two large groups of insurgents who admitted to having been trained in Cuba and infiltrated into Honduras through Nicaragua. The Sandinistas sent them to initiate armed operations against the democratic government of Honduras.

- Costa Rica, a nation without an army, has diplomatically protested numerous incursions by the Sandinista Army into Costa Rica. For example, in August 1985, the Costa Rican Government submitted to the Organization of American States a list of 123 aggressive actions by the Sandinistas against Costa Rica from June 6, 1982, until August 16, 1985.

- The United States closely monitors arms trafficking in Central America. While most of this information cannot be released to the public in order to protect intelligence sources and methods, the U.S. Congress found that the Government of Nicaragua has flagrantly violated the security of the nations of the region in that it "has committed and refuses to cease aggression in the form of armed subversion against its neighbors in viola-



December 7, 1985—This Lada automobile hit an abutment near Choluteca, Honduras, on its way from Nicaragua to El Salvador. Hidden on board were 7,000 rounds of ammunition, hand grenades, mobile radios, and codebooks addressed to Salvadoran guerrilla commanders.

tion of the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, and the 1965 United Nations General Assembly Declaration on Intervention" [Section 722(c)(2)(C)(vii), Public Law 99-83, the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1985] (See "*Revolution Beyond Our Borders*," *Sandinista Intervention in Central America*, September 1985, and *News Briefing: Intelligence Information on External Support of the Guerrillas in El Salvador*, August 8, 1984.)

Misconception: The Sandinistas were voted into power through free elections in November 1984, and the United States decided well before then to brand the elections a farce.

Facts:

- The United States consistently has called for fair and free elections in Nicaragua, and the development of democracy has been one of the objectives of our policy. Early U.S. support for the

Sandinista revolution was based on their promise to hold free and fair elections.

- The legitimacy of an electoral process cannot be determined solely by the technical aspects of the process on election day. The Nicaraguan election was seriously flawed because one party—the FSLN—controlled every aspect of the process, including the electoral machinery, most of the media, the police, the army, the courts, and mass organizations such as the neighborhood watch committees. The Sandinistas refused to grant opposition parties even the minimal conditions for a genuinely free election and sent mobs to disrupt their meetings. Sandinista supporters staffed the voting stations, registered the voters, and counted the ballots. Two-thirds of the precincts had not a single observer from any party except the FSLN to monitor the conduct of the voting operations and report on irregularities.

- Sandinista leaders repeatedly said elections serve only to consolidate Sandinista power. For example, Sandinista Defense Minister Humberto Ortega said, "These will be our elections. Remember that they are elections to reinforce power, because the people hold the power through their vanguard party, the Sandinista National Liberation Front and its National Directorate" (*Barricada*, July 31, 1980). And Sandinista Comandante Bayardo Arce stated, "We are using an instrument [Nicaragua's elections] . . . in order to form our own strategic objectives We must take advantage of this change, which the electoral process represents, to draw positive profits: The unity of the Marxist-Leninists of Nicaragua." (Arce's speech was printed in *La Vanguardia*, July 31, 1984.)

- The Sandinistas faced only token opposition on election day. Three of the parties on the ballot were minuscule Communist organizations. Another was a small group of the democratic left officially allied with the FSLN since 1980. The remaining party ran under the name of the traditional conservative party, a title it obtained with

Sandinista assistance. (It was one small faction of the parent party.) One democratic party pulled out of the campaign in late October to protest Sandinista abuses, but the FSLN-controlled Supreme Electoral Council ruled that the party's name stay on the ballot.

- The Nicaraguan election contrasted sharply with that in El Salvador where power was hotly contested and the Salvadoran people were given a real opportunity to select their leaders from a variety of political persuasions. Whereas in El Salvador the government offered the far left an opportunity to participate—which the far left declined—the Sandinistas emphatically excluded the armed Nicaraguan opposition from any role in the elections. The FSLN rebuffed all efforts by the civic opposition to obtain conditions that would have made the elections meaningful.

- There has been widespread international criticism of the Nicaraguan electoral process. For example:

- a) "What the regime in Nicaragua is doing is exactly what always has happened in all Communist regimes but in different shades. In the case of the neighbor country, for reasons that are perfectly transparent, the elections are an effective instrument to better the image of the regime, that is to say, to project to the outside world the appearance of a frank, open democracy and even a return to the original proposition of the anti-Somoza insurrection. . . . There will not be freedom of the press, nor a right to strike, nor free issuance of the vote. The result of the ballot box has already been dictated by the regime." (Costa Rican newspaper *La Nacion*, August 10, 1984)
- b) "The preparations for the elections and the country's political climate being what they are, free voting by individual citizens cannot be expected. The EDU [Euro-

pean Democratic Union] mission has arrived at the conclusion that in this context the demands of the *Coordinadora* are fully justified—leaving aside the general amnesty and the dialogue with the armed opposition; without a realization of these demands, free elections are not possible; on the contrary, it is the rejection of the demands which is an important indication that free elections are not intended. . . . The elections are being shaped and exploited by the Government of Nicaragua to the end of consolidating its own power and of facilitating further measures on the road to a Marxist-Leninist regime. The government for these reasons cannot afford free elections because they would conjure up the serious danger of its losing the majority." (European Democratic Union report on Nicaragua's electoral process, September 1984)

- c) "Only the naive believe that Sunday's election in Nicaragua was a democratic or legitimizing proof of the Sandinistas' popularity. The result was ordained when opposition parties tamely accepted terms that barred them from power." (*New York Times* editorial, November 7, 1984)

Misconception: The United States has been attacking Nicaragua's human rights record while ignoring serious situations in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Facts:

- The United States has repeatedly voiced its concern about the human rights situation in El Salvador and Guatemala, and it sought to use its influence on those governments to curb such abuses. There have been improvements in both countries. In El Salvador, according to information from the Catholic Church, the number of



January 10, 1985, Managua, Nicaragua: Daniel Ortega greets Cuban leader Fidel Castro, the only foreign head of state to attend Ortega's inauguration as President.

(Wide World photo)

murders committed by right-wing death squads has decreased steadily in the last 6 years with a sharp downturn in 1984. By 1985, the majority of murders were being committed by Cuban-backed guerrillas who stepped up efforts to mine areas near civilian populations.

- The human rights situation in Nicaragua is deplorable. The independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights has documented numerous cases of murders, disappearances, tortures, and prolonged detentions without trial for

which the Sandinista Government is directly responsible. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission's report for 1985-1986 states "profound concern over the serious human rights situation in Nicaragua. The escalation of...repressive actions under the state of emergency necessarily translate[s] into greater suffering for the Nicaraguan people...."

- Following the 1984 elections, the situation deteriorated markedly. The Sandinistas once again imposed heavy censorship on *La Prensa*. In 1985, the GRN prevented individuals considered to be opponents from leaving the country. In 1986, it closed *La Prensa* indefinitely and forced Catholic Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega and Father Bismarck Carballo into exile.

Misconception: The United States has not taken effective steps to encourage democracy and oppose dictators in Central America.

Facts:

- The United States strongly supports democracy in Central America, and this support is yielding positive results.

- Honduras in the past 6 years has made the transition from a military regime to a democratic civilian government.

- El Salvador has continued the democratic process launched in October 1979, weathering challenges from a violent right and a foreign-supported Marxist insurgency, to hold free elections and install a constitutional civilian government.

- Guatemala displayed its commitment to democracy in July 1984 elections held for a constituent assembly and in presidential elections held in December 1985, which attracted the largest turnout in Guatemalan history.

- Costa Rica continues to enjoy a flourishing democracy.

- Of the Central American states, only Nicaragua has moved away from democracy.

- In addition to its firm political support for democracy in Central America, in the past 6 years the United States has provided nearly \$3 billion in economic aid to stimulate development and about \$900 million in military aid to build a shield behind which these fragile democracies can grow.

Misconception: The underlying reason for the problems in U.S.-Nicaraguan relations is the American concern that a Marxist Nicaragua could become a model for other Central American countries.

Facts:

- The Sandinista seizure of power in 1979 raised hopes that the Nicaraguan people would soon enjoy a democratic government that would promote social justice and improve the quality of their lives. The Sandinistas, using vast amounts of foreign aid—much of it from the United States—announced a number of programs, including a literacy campaign, construction of clinics, and expanded medical care. The programs were announced with much fanfare, and the Sandinista press releases describing the “miraculous” successes of these programs were generally repeated uncritically by the international press.

- Had the Sandinistas fulfilled their promises to the Nicaraguan people for better lives and had the new government evolved toward a social democratic system, they possibly might have developed a model that could be emulated. Today none of Nicaragua's neighbors desires to copy the Sandinista system.

- The widely touted health and literacy programs launched by the Sandinistas have not worked as people hoped. Initial gains are disappearing for lack of follow-up and the unavailability

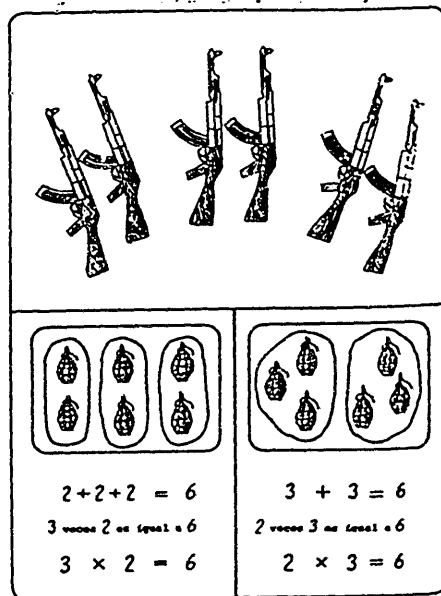
ity of interesting and uncensored reading material. The people are tired of the Marxist propaganda material made available to them in the guise of instructional material. The quality of instruction in the educational system has decreased. By 1983, only a small percentage of graduating secondary school students could pass a standardized examination. This lowering of academic standards is attributable in part to the injection of massive doses of Sandinista political propaganda into the educational program and to the conscription of school age children into the military.

- While some advances have been made in preventive health care, the quality of curative medicine in Nicaragua has fallen sharply. The Sandinistas' repressive policies have driven many Nicaraguan doctors, nurses, and medical technicians into exile. Nicaraguans complain that the Cuban personnel who provide much of the medical service in Nicaragua today are poorly trained.

- The Sandinistas expanded membership in their own trade unions while intimidating and harassing the leaders and members of independent labor movements. The International Labor Organization has expressed concern over the large number of trade unionists and employee representatives arrested and noted that "freedom of association can only be exercised" where fundamental human rights and "freedom from arbitrary arrest are fully respected and guaranteed." Many former trade union leaders have gone into exile or taken up arms.

- Despite billions of dollars of foreign aid since 1979, per capita income in Nicaragua has declined to the levels of the early 1960s. Inflation is soaring—650% in 1986 according to the Government of Nicaragua—and workers' wages continually decline in purchasing power.

- Whereas Nicaragua, prior to 1979, was a net food exporter, it is now a net importer of food. Production has dropped, and Nicaraguans are facing serious shortages of food as well as basic



Grade-school arithmetic books use pictures of Soviet-made AK-47 rifles and hand grenades to teach children to count.

consumer goods. Food is rationed. The issuance of ration coupons by the local Sandinista Defense Committees has become a method of political pressure. Queues, typical of Eastern Europe, are now an everyday sight in Nicaraguan markets. Basic necessities often are available only on the black market at highly inflated prices.

- In contrast to the poverty affecting Nicaraguan workers and peasants, the Sandinista elite drive luxury cars and have followed the Soviet example of opening special stores where they can buy goods unavailable to the rest of the population. People elsewhere in Central America are not yearning to have the Nicaraguan model imposed upon them.

The following publications are available from the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Attack on the Church: Persecution of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua

Comandante Bayardo Arce's Secret Speech Before the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN)

Crackdown on Freedom in Nicaragua and Profiles of Internal Opposition Leaders

Dispossessed, the Miskito Indians in Sandinista Nicaragua

Human Rights in Nicaragua—From Revolution to Repression

Inside the Sandinista Regime: A Special Investigator's Perspective

In Their Own Words: Testimony of Nicaraguan Exiles

"Revolution Beyond Our Borders," Sandinista Intervention in Central America

Sandinista Prisons: A Tool of Intimidation

The Challenge to Democracy in Central America

The U.S. and Central America: Implementing the National Bipartisan Commission Report (Special Report No. 148)

What Latin American Leaders Say About the Situation in Central America

If you would like to receive additional information, contact the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean:

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